

# AGAINST THE ODDS:

Women Leading the  
Struggle for Global Justice



trōcaire



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Women's Participation: A Matter of Justice	3
3.	Women Human Rights and Resource Rights Defenders	9
4.	Women at the Forefront of Food Security and Climate Action	16
5.	Women Activists on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	24
6.	Women at the Frontline of Responding to Humanitarian Crises	33
7.	Summary & Recommendations	39
8.	Endnotes	43

Ancilla Uzamukunda from Nyamagabe District, Rwanda, was elected by her community to be part of a group in charge of reporting cases of gender-based violence to the authorities. As part of this work she handles sensitive cases, helping to link people with the relevant authorities and support services within the community, as well as to an effective peer support network. Photo: Trócaire/Andrea Sciorato.

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# I 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an overview of some of the many areas where women are leading and creating change around the world.

Focusing particularly on areas that Trócaire works on, the paper includes many individual women's stories of leadership to highlight both the countless achievements of women around the world as well as the contextual challenges that women face in seeking to take on decision-making and leadership roles.

Across the world women are at the forefront of leadership and activism in their families and communities. They are champions of a fairer society and first responders in situations of crisis, and are claiming this space in contexts where the odds are often stacked against them. Women participate and lead in contexts that frequently constrain and question their right to speak out, to lead and to make decisions on the issues they are passionate about. The intersectionality of different identities, groups of belonging, power dynamics and other factors - such as class, race, ethnicity, disability, sex, gender and age - can marginalise some women even further and present additional barriers.

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At the heart of the paper are 22 case studies celebrating the individual stories of women leaders and activists who are at the forefront of work on human rights, access to natural resources, tackling sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and responding to humanitarian crises. The importance of ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making fora related to all these issues cannot be understated. The case studies speak for themselves in terms of conveying the determination, strength and struggles of these women and women leaders around the world; their accomplishments are particularly remarkable and inspiring given the barriers that they often encounter.

Trócaire works with these women to support their empowerment and struggle towards gender equality. Trócaire believes gender equality means enjoying rights, responsibilities, and opportunities on an equal basis for women and men. Moreover, individuals, communities and entire countries benefit from gender equality. As well as being a fundamental human rights issue, achieving gender equality also delivers social dividends such as better education and health, and can lead to more inclusive economic growth. Trócaire supports women's voices and participation, women's economic empowerment, human rights-based responses to SGBV and protection of women, girls and at-risk groups in humanitarian crises.<sup>1</sup>

Focusing on the key areas of our work, this paper highlights the ongoing barriers to women's participation. Women's restricted access to decision-making roles fuels the vicious circle of exclusion and inequality that undermines the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The exclusion of and discrimination against women are especially striking in the areas of human rights, natural resource rights and food security, SGBV and responses to humanitarian crises. The following sections examine the barriers and impacts of excluding women, how women are leading and what actions governments need to take in each of the areas of focus for Trócaire.

This paper is a call to action for governments, in particular the Irish Government, to stand behind, support and enable all women to become empowered, and to ensure gender-sensitive decision-making at all levels on the issues affecting women's lives.

## 2. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: A MATTER OF JUSTICE

The participation of women in decisions that affect their lives is a matter of justice, and is enshrined in international human rights law.

Supporting women to participate fully in social, economic, cultural and political life across society is essential to respecting and protecting their human rights. It also contributes to building stronger economic and social communities through inclusive economic growth, eradicating poverty, achieving internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improving the quality of life for women, men, families and communities.<sup>2</sup> The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights defines State obligations with respect to the right to participation.<sup>3</sup> Women's right to participation is explicitly referenced in a number of international agreements and instruments.<sup>4</sup>

The United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and subsequent Security Council Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122 and 2242, reaffirm the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, providing a global agenda for women's participation in peace and security issues for sustainable stability.<sup>5</sup>

While women do not represent a homogenous group, they bring their different talents, perspectives and experiences to decision-making fora. In turn, decision-making benefits from their knowledge and their inputs, and changes how issues are prioritised politically. Decision-making that takes into account

the different needs and capacities of women, men, girls and boys can respond more efficiently and effectively to these needs. In the long term, women's participation and empowerment support and promote gender equality, especially because decision-making processes can reinforce gender equality/inequalities.<sup>6</sup>

Despite States' legal and political commitments and the proven benefits of women's participation in decision-making,<sup>7</sup> women are under-represented and excluded from decision-making roles at all levels – from within their households and communities to political institutions nationally and internationally. Many women, for instance, face limited household decision-making power as a result of a number of factors, including patriarchal attitudes.

Women's empowerment is further affected by structural issues including legal frameworks, cultural norms, and practices between women and men, and States and citizens.<sup>8</sup> The denial of women's equal rights and gender-based discrimination remain the most pervasive drivers of inequalities.<sup>9</sup>

### Political participation

While women's representation in decision-making globally has increased, with the percentage of women parliamentarians having more than doubled to 23.8 percent since the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform

for Action,<sup>10</sup> men continue to be overrepresented in the majority of parliaments worldwide.<sup>11</sup>

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe presented a six-step action plan of fast-track strategic interventions for promoting gender equality in elected office. This plan proposes guaranteeing equal constitutional rights for women and men, reforming the type of electoral system, reviewing laws related to candidate recruitment (including the use of reserved seats or gender quotas), reviewing internal party rules and recruitment processes, building the skills and resources of women in the pipeline for elected office, and reforming parliamentary rules and internal procedures.<sup>12</sup>

While various strategies can be used to promote gender equality in elected office, it has been estimated that, at the current pace, it will take 99 years until equal representation is reached globally.<sup>13</sup>

Accessing positions of power at community or national level is a powerful means of increasing women's voice and influence. However, women who seek positions of representation often face prejudiced social norms and beliefs that try to confine them to the private sphere, undermine their role as political decision makers, limit the support they get from political parties (and even from family members), and affect the raising of campaign

funds.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the gendered distribution of unpaid domestic and care work, which is essential yet undervalued by society, makes it more challenging to balance political commitments,<sup>15</sup> with many women citing their domestic responsibilities as the greatest constraint to entering politics.<sup>16</sup>

When women do enter politics, they frequently remain excluded from areas traditionally seen as 'male', such as finance, energy, defence and infrastructure,<sup>17</sup> and responsibilities related to furthering gender equality often fall solely to them.<sup>18</sup> Female politicians can encounter various forms of violence on the basis of their gender, including physical and sexual violence, which can impact on self-confidence and willingness to stand for re-election.<sup>19</sup> In one study, 82 percent of women parliamentarians reported experiencing psychological violence, with 44 percent having experienced assault, abduction, rape or death threats towards them or their families.<sup>20</sup>

In practical terms, the unequal representation of women in political decision-making means that policies and budgets are implemented that may not take into account the perspectives of both women and men, with disproportionate negative impacts on women.

### Economic participation

Across the world, women experience higher poverty rates than men.<sup>21</sup> Of the 750 million adults who are illiterate, two thirds are women. While three quarters of working-age men are in the labour force, this figure stands at just half for their female counterparts. These women are overrepresented in the 'contributing family workers' category, where they work without any direct pay. Women

are paid less than men for work of equal value, are less likely to receive a pension, and are more likely to work in the informal sector.

Women undertake approximately 2.5 times more unpaid domestic and care work than men, limiting their participation in the labour force,<sup>22</sup> education, politics and leisure. Additionally, the gender digital divide persists, with women being 10 percent less likely to own a mobile phone and 26 percent less likely to use mobile internet than men in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>23</sup>

### Participation is vital

Trócaire believes that supporting the empowerment and participation of women is central to bringing about a more just and peaceful world. Trócaire understands that development cannot be achieved without explicitly responding to the different needs and realities of women and men and challenging gender discrimination and injustice. Women's rights and women-led organisations and movements play a critical role in addressing gender inequalities at the national and local level in development and humanitarian contexts.

As many of the case studies within this paper demonstrate, women's organisations are often at the forefront of preventing and responding to SGBV: providing services to survivors as well as working with communities on challenging gender inequalities. They play a vital role in local and national advocacy on women's empowerment. Furthermore, research has shown that mobilisation of women's rights organisations and movements is strongly linked to reducing violence against women.<sup>24</sup>

## TRÓCAIRE'S APPROACH TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:

Trócaire's approach to supporting women's empowerment has evolved through the years. Following a three-year research project on women's empowerment in Nicaragua, India and DRC, Trócaire established a Women's Empowerment Framework in 2016 to guide programme development. This new approach involves the transformation of power relations, through working with individuals and groups to challenge unequal power relations in all spheres of life.<sup>25</sup> We work to:

- Support women's empowerment through awareness raising of women's rights and gender equality, women's leadership and mentoring programmes, and women's economic empowerment and business development.
- Support the creation of an enabling environment for women's empowerment within households, communities and institutions.
- Support women leaders and their networks to identify priority needs, develop advocacy plans to respond to these needs, and hold leaders and duty-bearers to account.





## COUNCILLOR AMINATA SIERRA LEONE

### **Aminata Bangura knew the problems facing women in her district of Sierra Leone.**

Looking around her community, she could see the high levels of violence they faced, as well as the shortage of economic opportunities.

She wanted to do something to change the lives of women and girls in her area but felt her lack of confidence was holding her back. Aminata enrolled in a training course run by the Association for the Well Being of Rural Communities and Development (ABC-D) and the Campaign for Good Governance. These trainings built her skills in areas such as public speaking. It was a life-changing experience.

“I was someone who was shy and not very outspoken, but that changed after ABC-D’s workshop, when they gave us exercises, like asking us to debate in English,” she says. “From that day forward, I have been bold and always ready to express myself freely with no hesitation.”

Aminata had unsuccessfully stood for election once before, but her new skills gave her the confidence to stand again. In March 2018, she was elected Councillor for her district. Although there are 23 local Councillors, only three are women.

Even prior to her election, Aminata had taken steps for helping women in her community. Through her involvement with the Kountu Women’s Association and the Kountu Farmers Association she had helped women access credit from local banks. Women in Sierra Leone face challenges in accessing and owning land, and as a result find it very difficult to secure enough capital to support themselves out of poverty.

This work led to women in the community asking her to run for election. However, along with other women standing for election, she faced intimidation for doing so, and was confronted with particular hostility from men. She drew strength from women mobilising with placards

during rallies in the lead up to the elections. She also gained support from other women candidates, who assisted each other throughout the campaign.

Even today, Aminata notes that men often attempt to tell her what to say in meetings, something she resists. She remarks that men can come across as more confident, despite not necessarily having higher levels of skills or education than women. For her, it is important to increase the confidence of women to participate in activities traditionally dominated by men.

Aminata wants to encourage other women to stand for election. She has joined a group of women Councillors who come together to form a core team of mentors for other women. Economic opportunities for women, addressing teenage pregnancies, and provision of water and sanitation facilities remain her key drivers in her role as Councillor.

# EVANGELIQUE MUKAMTWALI

## RWANDA

**Evangelique Mukamtwali (31), from southern Rwanda,** always held very traditional views of a woman's role in society. When she married, she was satisfied to carry out household tasks and depend on her new husband for income.

However, it was not long before she began challenging her perceptions. She found that it was difficult for both herself and her husband to survive on his earnings. They were living in poor conditions and she became very withdrawn socially.

Last May, Evangelique became involved in the Participation in Decision-Making project implemented by the Commission Diocésaine Justice et Paix (CDJP) Gikongoro in partnership with Trócaire in her area. This made her think about her role in the family and the community.

"I have gradually come to know my rights and I have slowly

become involved in several different groups," she says. "As I started to see that people were looking at me not only as a regular member but rather as a resource because of my increasing skills, I gained much more confidence in myself and my self-esteem really benefitted from it."

In fact, the community proposed Evangelique as a candidate for a formal decision-making group, to which she was then elected.

"I am now a member of the National Women's Council in my area and I chair the local working group for development" she says. "This is something that only one year ago was not on my horizon; I couldn't even think to participate in a meeting, but now I'm in charge of leading some. Now, thanks to my participation in the project I have understood that I have capacities and that my community relies on me, and this has been

critical for coming out of my isolation."

Thanks to her position and acquired skills, Evangelique could also improve the condition of her household. Due to a saving and loan group she contributed to creating, she will shortly be able to count on some livestock to raise her family's income.

"This also led my husband to be proud of me, and now he strongly supports my participation in all the activities," Evangelique says.

Now Evangelique feels like a new person, free from fear and with many plans ahead. She shares that only through active participation in decision-making processes is it possible to have control over one's life and that being financially independent is a crucial enabling factor for this.





## TAJ MAHAL BIBI PAKISTAN



**In male-dominated societies like Pakistan,** working women face multiple challenges. However, women are pushing back against the limitations imposed on them. Taj Mahal Bibi, a member of the neighbourhood council from Madyan, Swat, is a prime example.

Taj Mahal was born in Madyan, Swat KP, Pakistan. At just 14 she was forced to marry her cousin who was 35 years of age. When her husband passed away, she was left with the responsibility of raising three sons and two daughters. Despite having received no formal education and not having a job, she took the brave step of beginning clothes stitching in her house to earn an income. She grew up in a typical conservative family that prohibited women from obtaining a job or stepping outside of the home. She dared to break these traditional restrictions and defied the will of her family with the goal of educating her children and providing a better future for them.

Learning from her own experience, she decided to devote her life to social work and the rights of widows. Her passion led to her becoming the first woman to be elected as a Woman Councillor from Madyan in the 2015 local government elections. During a meeting with staff from the Trust for Democratic Election and Accountability (TDEA) and the Free and Fair Election Network, she came to learn about the gender programme of the Pakistan Village Development Programme and accepted their offer to attend these trainings and work with them for the support of gender equality and women's rights.

TDEA's trainings on the local government system and its rightful usage by elected members equipped Taj Mahal with the knowledge to help develop a healthy relationship between the government and citizens, and learn about the role and responsibility of local government with respect to social issues.

"The part of the trainings that covers the protection of women's rights and the prevention of gender-based violence was quite a new subject for me to learn about," she says.

When she was first elected, she advocated for widow's inheritance rights and establishing small-scale vocation training centres. She faced resistance and threats, but she continued her work despite the risks to her life. Men in the community became angry with her and tried to prevent her from undertaking her social work. Even her relatives did not stand alongside her, but she continued to fight for the cause.

Now, Taj Mahal has profound knowledge of gender-based violence issues in her area in addition to social mobilisation skills. She has experience moving resolutions, writing applications and raising questions in her neighbourhood council to demand women's inclusion in decision-making processes and development schemes. Taj Mahal knows about legal aid processes and referral mechanisms for survivors of gender-based violence set by Trócaire partner organisations and using it when and where required. Women like Taj Mahal are distinguished by exceptional courage, nobility and strength and are sources of strength for other women in societies like Swat.

**In light of the ongoing barriers to women's empowerment and political participation, we call on all governments, and in particular the Irish government, to:**

- **Support the empowerment of women** as both a standalone issue and an issue that can be integrated throughout all government policies and strategies, by:
    - Supporting long-term programming on women's empowerment, working to increase participation of women in both the public and private sector and enhancing social inclusion and community building.
    - Pursuing legislative and judicial reforms to expand social protections to women and eliminating traditional barriers to their advancement, including ensuring that laws relating to access to resources (such as land) do not discriminate against women.
    - Ensuring progress on all targets under Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality, with a view to achieving the Goal by 2030.
  - **Increase the political participation of women at all levels** to ensure that their knowledge and insights are incorporated into the design of policies, strategies and budgets, by:
    - Promoting the use of quotas at local and national levels with strict enforcement mechanisms, as well as multi-party democracies and proportional representation systems with large district magnitudes to maximise opportunities for women.<sup>26</sup>
    - Enacting measures to encourage and support women to participate in politics at all levels, including promoting parliamentary women's caucuses and ensuring that this is closely linked to and informed by local women's movements.
    - Taking measures to address factors that hinder women's political participation, including stigmatisation and harassment, inequitable distribution of domestic and care work, and gender gaps in educational attainment.
  - **Increase funding to women's rights and women-led organisations** at local and national levels in development and humanitarian contexts by:
    - Providing sufficient multi-annual funding for women's rights and women-led organisations and supporting capacity strengthening and accompaniment where needed to strengthen organisational and technical capacities.<sup>27</sup>
-



## 3. WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESOURCE RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In line with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (also known as the International Bill of Rights), States have committed to upholding human rights, and have incorporated these obligations in national constitutions and laws.

The 1998 Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (commonly known as the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders) acknowledges the right to defend human rights and affirms that this is protected internationally.

Despite these instruments, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) – female human rights defenders, and any human rights defenders who work in the defence of women’s rights or on gender issues<sup>28</sup> – face challenges including stigmatisation, threats and intimidation against themselves and their families, arrests and detention, and killings. Not only do they face these risks for what they do, as experienced by many HRDs, as women they also must contend with stereotypes that undermine their role as leaders.<sup>29</sup> They face gender-specific risks for who they are, which can take the form of gendered verbal abuse, sexualised defamation campaigns, sexual abuse and rape.<sup>30</sup> WHRDs can also experience a triple burden due to the gendered division of labour,<sup>31</sup> social and customary limitations that restrain their

activism, and attacks that focus on their reputation and sexuality as defying norms of perceived ‘appropriate’ female behaviour.<sup>32</sup> WHRDs are attacked and killed with higher levels of violence and brutality,<sup>33</sup> and defamation, mobility restrictions, intimidation and threats (often with a gendered dimension) are more often experienced by WHRDs than their male counterparts.<sup>34</sup>

These risks are compounded particularly when WHRDs fight for women’s rights and gender equality, challenging existing gender norms and power structures,<sup>35</sup> when their actions can be perceived as culturally or traditionally disruptive.<sup>36</sup>

### Leading against the odds

WHRDs are leading in the protection of human rights for people and communities across a wide variety of civil, political, social, cultural and economic areas. These include, but are not limited to, gender equality and supporting women’s empowerment, governance, justice, access to and use of resources, environmental protection, health, education and employment. WHRDs work alone and as part of organised groups, at local, national and international

levels, to lobby, advocate, educate, document, monitor, counsel and assist others.<sup>37</sup> The work of WHRDs, through the Global Campaign for Women’s Human Rights, led to the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action in 1993, which explicitly recognised women’s rights as human rights. WHRDs have had successes in every area, and are recognised now more than ever for their efforts.<sup>38</sup> They help mobilise others to demand their rights, and often work at the frontlines of conflict and disasters.

### Protecting and promoting women human rights defenders and democratic space

States have failed to provide adequate protection for WHRDs, facing challenges in implementation, political resolve and gender sensitivity.<sup>39</sup> While the State is the primary perpetrator of violations against human rights defenders, WHRDs face threats and abuses to themselves and their work from corporations as well as their own communities<sup>40</sup> - violations which often remain unseen and unreported by government and civil society.<sup>41</sup> This leads to a culture of silence, shame and impunity for attacks

## JESTINA MUKOKO ZIMBABWE

**Jestina Mukoko was awarded the International Women of Courage Award for risking her life in defence of human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe.**

A journalist by profession, Jestina is the National Director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP). ZPP was established by a group of non-governmental and church organisations in 2000 to work for sustainable peace, justice, dignity and development for all.

ZPP's community-based activities have led to it becoming a key player in the pursuit for human rights in Zimbabwe. This includes monitoring and documenting violence and human rights violations, as well as assisting with access to legal redress, medical care, counselling and other forms of support.

In Zimbabwe, this is dangerous work. In December 2008, Jestina was blindfolded and abducted from her home in the early hours of the morning. Two of her colleagues from ZPP were also abducted five days later. With no information on their whereabouts, they remained missing for more than three weeks, with police officials denying that they were in police custody. Many feared the worst for Jestina and her colleagues.

Later that month, it was discovered that they were being held in a police station in Harare. Eight abductees, including the ZPP activists, were subsequently held at Chikurubi maximum-security prison on the unfounded charges of recruiting individuals to train as terrorists. During this time, Jestina was interrogated, demeaned, tortured, refused

medical treatment and denied contact with her lawyers. The torture included beatings on the soles of her feet in a method called *falanga*, favoured because, at the time, it was difficult to detect the injuries caused.

Jestina was eventually moved to a hospital in February 2009 due to her worsening medical condition. In March 2009, she was released on bail, and was indicted for trial in April 2009.

During this time, Jestina had applied to the Constitutional Court to end the criminal proceedings against her. The evidence of torture and rights abuses was not contested by the State, who in fact claimed in an affidavit that the officers involved were fulfilling their mandate. In September 2009, the Constitutional Court ordered an immediate end to the criminal proceedings.

"Looking back, I see myself as a survivor," she says. "I think I have triumphed because what happened on that day. I actually thought that my life was ending. So being able to find myself still alive, I think it's really God's grace that I need to be thankful for."

In 2010, Jestina's efforts were recognised by the US State Department when she was one of ten women globally to be awarded with an International Women of Courage Award. Receiving the award, Jestina paid tribute to the many courageous women to have paid with their lives for speaking up.

"By accepting this award bestowed on the ten of us, we confirm that women have a place in the fight for equality and justice, as this award we believe actually belongs to the multitude



of women we work with and some we honour posthumously today because they are no longer with us, having died fighting the good fight," she said. "The award beckons us to stand tall and refuse to be intimidated and harassed.

"We do not want to be passive bystanders, and it is such recognition that ensures that we do not tire until we reach the finish line and pass the baton to the next generation, the girls who are among us."

Despite such experiences, Jestina and her colleagues in ZPP continue to work for the protection of human rights and sustainable peace in Zimbabwe: "The work that I do at the Zimbabwe Peace Project is one illuminating factor that gives me a sense of wanting to continue; a sense that does not allow fear to bog me down."

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**"Looking back, I see myself as a survivor"**

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# MARIA LUISA COL GUATEMALA

**Maria Luisa (60) is a Mayan Q'eqchi woman, mother and grandmother with a significant story to tell;** a story of trauma, violence, discrimination and abuse during the internal armed conflict.

She stands strong and dignified, her face lined with the stories of the past but softened by compassion for her fellow women and the hardship they continue to endure. Maria Luisa is from Coban town and was part of Coordinadora de Víctimas de Alta Verapaz (CODEVI), an association of widows where she trained as a midwife.

Hers is a painful story – a story of a disappeared husband, a violent military invasion of their community on 13 January 1983 and a resolution of sorts with the identification of his body at the military barracks 33 years later.

“When they came to the community they started kidnapping people,” she recalls. “They took women and men and sometimes even children. My husband and his brother were taken. He was a Catechist – he said, ‘I’m doing this for God.’ Why would they take him?”

The military came and accused them of being guerrilla fighters. All she knew was that he had been taken by the military - she went to the barracks in Coban but was told nothing. However, she never gave up.

Research undertaken by a small group of relatives of the disappeared discovered that there were secret graves at the military barracks. In February 2012, Maria Luisa received a phone call asking her to gather the widows together. The Attorney General had issued an order to break into the military barracks and investigate. They gathered, women and children carrying tools in case they were asked to dig.

While the anthropologists spent three months digging, Maria Luisa was asked to translate for the community.

She had not dealt with her own pain and now had to deal with the pain of others too.

“It was very difficult – I wasn’t prepared to receive all that information,” she recalls. “The forensic team said you have to be strong. We all started crying.

Some of the remains were hugging each other; some were blindfolded while others tied up by the ankle and wrists – women, children... all mixed in together. People were screaming and crying – we all started praying. We went from one grave to the other - it was so painful.”

Maria Luisa’s husband, Arnolando Chen Poou, was identified from DNA tests in June 2016: “I was able to bury him, to give him a Christian burial. I still need to find my brother-in-law and two other relatives.”

That pain has not left Maria Luisa but she has been supported by Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial (ECAP), a Trócaire partner that provides psychosocial support to those who experienced the Guatemalan internal conflict, particularly indigenous communities. Maria Luisa attributes her ability to move forward to the counselling she received from ECAP: “I’m so grateful to the staff in ECAP, their support was invaluable as an individual and as a group,” she says. “I had my own pain but listening to the other stories was too much. I thank God. I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Without them I don’t think I would have recovered. It’s not just me saying thank you, it’s the voices of all the women from the community. ECAP built my capacity so I can support others.”

Maria Luisa is now a community leader helping other women. Her hope for the future is quite simple: to get justice.

“What they did was not correct – they took away innocent people, they took away children,” she says. “What wrong could they have done?”



against WHRDs. Globally, space to defend human rights is shrinking and human rights defenders are more vulnerable than ever to attacks, threats and criminalisation.

A number of avenues exist for strengthening action by Ireland and the European Union (EU) in support of protecting human rights defenders and civil society space. For example, the **EU Country Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society** is a joint initiative that began in 2014 between the European Union and Member States to strengthen EU engagement with civil society. Over one hundred Roadmaps have been adopted by EU delegations and are being implemented to date, playing an important role in supporting the shaping of institutional and legal frameworks related to civil society organisations (CSOs), and women's involvement in the Roadmap process is therefore critical. Many delegations use the Roadmap as an entry point to engage with a broad range of CSOs. They play an important role in opening spaces for dialogue in contexts where civil society space

is shrinking, and for promoting human rights and freedoms. These spaces must be open to women and women-centred organisations to ensure that those working on gender equality, women's rights issues and the rights and freedoms of WHRDs are promoted through this process. These spaces must also ensure that organisations representing women's rights and needs can avail of capacity building, raised awareness with public authorities about their work and added value, and that they can inform donor understanding of the civil society landscape.<sup>42</sup>

The **EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders**, adopted in 2004, provide operational recommendations for action and address specific concerns for the EU in relation to HRDs. Given that EU Missions must report on the situation of HRDs in line with the Guidelines, this provides a platform with which to highlight the situation of WHRDs and violations of their rights. Improved coherence in implementation of the Guidelines is necessary, as it has been noted that the Guidelines have not been

systematically implemented by EU Member States across EU mission countries.<sup>43</sup> There are a number of situations where the duty of the State to protect human rights may be insufficient, and businesses may need to take on a more proactive role. For example, the State may not have full control (for instance in conflict zones or areas of weak State governance), a corporation may incentivise human rights violations by the State itself, and some corporations may be larger than their host country, resulting in an imbalance of power.<sup>44</sup>

There is growing momentum for the **United Nations Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights**. One hundred States participated in the Third Session of the Intergovernmental Working Group towards such a treaty. The latter is required to address insufficiencies in the global legal framework that has not kept up with evolutions in the global economic and business reality, and to help redress the current imbalances between the rights and obligations of business. A culture of impunity contributes to creating an environment where

### TRÓCAIRE'S APPROACH TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC SPACE:

Central to Trócaire's approach is the belief that people and representative civil society organisations can champion the rights of those who are marginalised and can engage with governments and other power-holders to demand respect and protection of rights and accountability. Trócaire supports WHRDs and the communities they represent to build their knowledge, skills and capacity and to mobilise to take collective action to demand their rights and protect

themselves. Trócaire advocates for democratic and transparent political processes, to ensure an enabling environment that supports the protection and fulfilment of rights. Trócaire programmes adopt a number of key strategies to protect human rights and democratic space:

- Advocacy at local, national and international levels to protect democracy and civil society space.
- Promoting transparent and open government principles, processes, and institutions such as parliament and national commissions.

- Supporting citizens to engage in policy monitoring and advocacy work.
- Speaking out against violations of human rights, highlighting the injustices visited on victims and survivors, and calling for action from those in authority.
- Support victims and survivors of human rights violations to cope and reduce and eliminate their vulnerability to further abuse.



women and men face harassment and the risk of abuse in defending their rights. The implementation of the Irish **National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights** is an important means of ensuring that Irish businesses respect human rights, both in Ireland and overseas.

**In light of the severe threats to women human rights defenders and civil society space for women's activism, we call on all governments, in particular Ireland, to:**

- Promote greater participation of women and women-centred organisations in the **EU Country Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society process**, with a focus on the enabling environment, and contribute to their consistent implementation.
- **Contribute to more consistent implementation of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, including support for WHRDs by:**
  - Ensuring EU Missions pay attention to the work of HRDs and the challenges they encounter, with a specific focus on the risks faced by WHRDs.
  - Implementing the Guidelines in a way that ensures that WHRDs working in remote areas, or working unregistered or outside of networks have access to appropriate security measures when required.<sup>45</sup>
  - Ensuring an environment where WHRDs can operate freely without risks of intimidation, harassment and sexual violence by State and non-State actors.<sup>46</sup>
- EU delegations meeting with representatives from the diplomatic and HRD communities to reflect, discuss and take action on the gender-specific protection needs of WHRDs in their mission countries.<sup>47</sup>
- Preparing local implementation strategies with a particular emphasis on WHRDs.<sup>48</sup>
- **Ensure full protection of human rights with respect to business, by:**
  - Adopting a United Nations Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights that includes strong language on the State's obligation to **protect human rights defenders** working in the context of business activities, including establishing specific measures to protect human rights defenders against any form of criminalisation and obstruction to their work, including SGBV against women human rights defenders.
  - Fully, promptly and independently investigating and punishing attacks and intimidation against WHRDs and ensuring access to justice to reduce the current climate of impunity that many powerful companies enjoy.
- **Ireland should ensure the National Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAP) is adopted and implemented effectively, by:**
  - Ensuring the implementation plan is rooted in a comprehensive gender analysis to ensure that the NAP is appropriate for and responds to the different needs of women and men.
  - Including practical support for all businesses to ensure that they are in a position to implement the NAP to better respect human rights, including a focus on women's rights. To this end, this should also include respect for decent employment and gender equitable labour laws.
  - Ensuring coherence between the implementation of the National Plan on Business and Human Rights and Ireland's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.
  - Supporting partner governments to ensure that business and economic regulation and legislation implement commitments to human rights including those related to gender equality, as well as providing support for the promotion of inclusive economic growth, including opportunities and outcomes for women.



## MARIE DZ'VENGA DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

**Marie Dz'venga (33) is from the Ituri province of the Democratic Republic of Congo**, an area where local custom forbids women from speaking publicly in front of an assembly. With no formal education, Marie accepted women's status and did not question it.

That was before she participated in training aimed at encouraging women to speak up. Marie joined a local participatory governance training and soon found her eyes opened and her confidence increased.

Not long after, she was nominated by her community to become a member of Noyau Pacifiste des Mamans (NPM), a women's

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**"I am no longer afraid to express myself in front of people, even in a large assembly."**

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group working for peace. She has participated in several trainings on human rights, community mobilisation, advocacy and participatory local governance from the Forum des Mamans de l'Ituri, one of the programme's partners.

She has learned that all human beings have the right to participate in peaceful meetings and to express themselves freely, and that women and men have the same rights and are equal.

"I was unable to stand in front of people and express myself freely," she said. "These different trainings have awakened and freed me from fear. At present, I am no longer afraid to express myself in front of people, even in a large assembly."

Marie and other NPM members sensitise their fellow community members about their rights and responsibilities, identify women's priority needs and advocate for solutions to address these needs.



## DAW TIN HLA MYANMAR

**Weak environmental laws in Myanmar have allowed corporations to pollute water sources** which has affected the livelihoods and health of nearby communities. Communities in Myanmar, including some strong women, are standing up for their rights and challenging companies to stop the ongoing pollution of their water and their land.

As of October 2015, Myanmar was the third largest producer of tin in the world. The Heinda tin mine is one of the largest and oldest tin mines in Myanmar, located in the Tanintharyi Region in the southeast of the country. It has been in operation for over one hundred years since British colonial times, and is currently operated by a Thai company.

Since 2008, pollution from the Heinda mine has contaminated the Myaung Pyo River. The surrounding communities use this water as a source for drinking, domestic use and for irrigation.

The communities around the mine rely on agriculture. They cultivate

betel nut, rubber, coconut, vegetables, cashews and bananas.

Daw Tin Hla (61) lives in Myaung Pyo village in southern Myanmar, which has been affected by pollution from the nearby Heinda tin mine. She is active on her village's mining monitoring group, which gets access to observe the company's mine, and engages directly with government.

She says that as a result of the pollution, the water is not safe to drink and only 30 families of the 140 in the village have access to safe drinking water.

Daw Tin Hla has lost 250 betel nut trees and 12 coconut trees on her land due to flooding caused by the mine, and has not received any compensation.

With the monsoon rains setting in, Daw Tin Hla is worried more flooding could happen in the coming months, bringing more polluted water into the village lands.

She has been active in organising the community,

campaigning for compensation and for the company to prevent further pollution of their river. One success has been the establishment of a formal mining monitoring group. The government gives this group the right to inspect the mine and report directly to the government with the community's concerns.

When the community lost their compensation case, Daw Tin Hla was very upset. She spoke publicly about the case, and cried during the press conference. She says "my plantations are my life, my only livelihood".

Daw Tin Hla doesn't trust in the company's Environmental Impact Assessment, saying that it has been done "in secrecy" without proper consultation with the community. However, she says that the regional Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation does listen to the community's concerns and negotiate with the company on their behalf.

Following meetings with the Minister and the monitoring group together with the company, Daw Tin Hla feels that the company is starting to behave better, including paying better wages to its staff.

Daw Tin Hla says that her knowledge has increased by attending training by a Trócaire partner organisation. When meeting the Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation she was able to highlight errors in the consultation process directly to him. She says "the government is responsible to protect the community" and needs to be accountable for their actions.



## 4. WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF FOOD SECURITY AND CLIMATE ACTION

There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between gender equality, food security and land rights.<sup>49</sup>

Notwithstanding their significant representation in the agricultural labour force, women across the world encounter limitations to their contributions to agricultural productivity.<sup>50</sup> They are often found concentrated in poorly compensated labour-intensive agriculture,<sup>51</sup> with their contributions remaining underrepresented in agricultural labour statistics.<sup>52</sup>

There persists a gender gap that disadvantages women in terms of access to productive resources for agricultural activities, including land. Women represent less than 20 percent of agricultural holders in Latin America and the Caribbean, 15 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 12 percent in South and Southeast Asia.<sup>53</sup> Compared to men, women's land - and in particular that of indigenous women - is usually of inferior quality,<sup>54</sup> with their right to it being less secure,<sup>55</sup> and they often face underrepresentation in decisions relating to the use of the land and its outputs.<sup>56</sup> Women are confronted with challenges in obtaining and retaining land as a result of patriarchal gender norms in communities, markets, customary and legal systems, and inheritance practices that frequently disadvantage women.<sup>57</sup>

Additionally, women have less access to agricultural inputs: they own fewer working animals for farming, and are less likely to use new technologies.<sup>58</sup> They often have less access to radio, mobile phones and other technologies

used for receiving information,<sup>59</sup> as well as limited access to agricultural extension services (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that female farmers receive just five percent of all agricultural extension services<sup>60</sup>), which may not be tailored to their specific needs.<sup>61</sup> Women may also face mobility restrictions that limit their access to resources and markets.<sup>62</sup> They access less credit (compounded by lower levels of education and less land to present as collateral), and often do not have control of the credit they do obtain.<sup>63</sup>

Women tend to shoulder much of the time-consuming unpaid household responsibilities related to food production, including collecting water, firewood and preparing the food itself, which must be redistributed if they are to spend their time in other ways.<sup>64</sup> These gender gaps in assets, inputs and services are detrimental not only to the women themselves and their ability to benefit from new economic opportunities,<sup>65</sup> but to the agricultural sector and the economy more widely.<sup>66</sup> There is a 20-30 percent yield gap between men and women, and the FAO has estimated that if women farmers had the same access to resources as men, agricultural output could increase by up to four percent in a number of developing countries, translating to a 17 percent reduction in the number of people undernourished.<sup>67</sup>

With women being over-represented in the informal economy and comprising half the agricultural workforce in least developed countries, yet owning less than 20 percent of the land and having less access to agricultural inputs and resources, they are bearing the brunt of the adverse effects that climate change has on the informal economy and agriculture.<sup>68</sup> For instance, it was estimated that all married women and 87 percent of unmarried women lost their main source of income when Cyclone Nargis hit the Ayeyarwaddy Delta in Myanmar in 2008.<sup>69</sup>

Given women's traditional responsibilities in many societies for food production and water and fuel collection, they depend closely on natural resources. This increases their vulnerability when these resources are affected by changing conditions,<sup>70</sup> including protracted drought, severe storms and flooding, deforestation and soil degradation.<sup>71</sup> For example in Kenya, during times of drought, some women spend up to eight hours a day finding water.<sup>72</sup>

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**Women tend to shoulder much of the time-consuming unpaid household responsibilities related to food production...**

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## JEANNE DZ'RA

### DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO



**Jeanne Dz'ra (29) did not have the chance to study because her parents did not attach importance to educating girls.**

Her lack of formal education always left her feeling self-conscious and reluctant to speak in front of groups or raise issues with the chief of her village in

Ituri province in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Not being able to read or write held her back. When she heard about a literacy programme available in her community, she decided to register to learn to read, write and understand more about her basic rights.

The literacy programme teaches adult women who have not had the opportunity to access education. Not only has the training given Jeanne literacy skills, it has completely changed her outlook on life.

"Literacy has changed my life," she says. "As long as I live, I will fight with all my strength to school all my children."

Building on the knowledge she acquired about her rights, Jeanne mobilised the community to advocate at village level for access to clean drinking water. The residents had been drinking water from the stream. As a result of these advocacy efforts, a clean water source has been developed for the village.

Currently, Jeanne has been appointed at the village level to work with women on issues related to access to health care and potable water.

"I am able to express myself in front of people without being self-conscious," she says. "I feel valued within my village."

## DAW AYE YA

### MYANMAR

**In the forests of south-eastern Myanmar, twenty villages are at risk of losing their land.**

Daw Aye Ya (54) lives in one of the villages at risk. Her village is classified as a 'Reserve Forest' area, an area which is protected by law and development is prohibited. Despite the communities having lived in this area for generations, they are at risk of losing their land because it is illegal for villages to be located in a 'Reserve Forest'.

Daw Aye Ya first heard of the situation at a training session organised by Tanintharyi Friends, Trócaire's local partner. Tanintharyi Friends explained to the community the detailed and complex issues of the land and forest laws in Myanmar, forest conservation, as well as

how to resolve disputes in the community as a result of it.

Tanintharyi Friends, along with Trócaire and the local community, is working to get documentation which will show that they have the right to stay on their land for the next three decades.

From the trainings, Daw Aye Ya has also learned about women's leadership, rights and equality. She says it is "unfair" that entitlements to land are usually recorded in official documentation under a man's name. This is because men are usually considered the "head of the household".

Daw Aye Ya has shared the knowledge learned in these trainings with small groups of women. She says she is confident to speak in public, as she has been chairperson of her Mon Baptist Women's Committee



Group in the village for twenty years.

She wants to inspire younger generations of women to speak up. There are younger women who are becoming active but lack confidence and are discouraged because they cannot read or write. The low levels of education motivates Daw Aye Ya to keep active and to share her knowledge.

## MARTHA KAMARA

### SIERRA LEONE

**Martha Kamara (50) is a farmer living in Mayeangu community in Bombali district, Northern Sierra Leone.** She is a mother to eight children, five girls and three boys, whom she is supporting through her farming activities and small-scale trading within the community.

Martha had been struggling to provide enough food, medicine and school fees for years, depending on her husband's decisions regarding household resources. The women in Martha's community have traditionally not been permitted to own or inherit land, placing them in a vulnerable position where they depend on their husbands for resources. To pay her children's school and medical fees and ensure they had enough to eat, Martha had no other option but to take loans with high interest rates from other community members. Any income she got from her small business she used to pay the interest on the loan.

In 2016, Martha became involved in Trócaire's Sustainable Livelihoods and Women's Empowerment project implemented by Develop Salone (DESAL). Through the project, she received tools and seeds and training on improved farming techniques and the Village Savings and Loans Association methodology. DESAL is also undertaking advocacy on the right of women to access and own land in Martha's community.

As a result of the intervention, Martha and her husband came to an agreement by which she could own and access some of his lands. Martha now has greater control over the decisions that affect her life and is able to pay for her children's medical fees and send them to school well fed.

"I now have the freedom to choose to plant any crop I see fit and am in control of any profit I make from this land."

Martha's involvement in the project has also given her a new level of confidence and voice and she has taken on the role of chairperson of both the farming group and the Village Savings and Loans Association. In these leadership positions, she has decided to use her new influence within the community to continue advocating for women's land rights. Motivated by her own success in gaining access to land and the independence it has given her, she is now working on gaining support to form a women's group dedicated specifically to defending their rights within the community. Martha also spends time moving from house to house to remind people of women's rights to land and to help to mediate family land issues.

"We have always been so deprived in these matters, so after this intervention and now knowing our rights, I feel motivated and know that I am doing the right thing to go around."

Her hope is now to refine her leadership skills to rally more support within the community and to spread the message to neighbouring communities, where women's ownership of land is still not permitted.

"I would like to see women and men work together for equal access to land, it should be a conversation between both," is the advice Martha gives. "Women should stand firm for their rights and fight hard. Let all women be independent for their welfare."





## SUSAN BOL YOUT

### SOUTH SUDAN



**Susan Bol Yout always wanted to attend university** but after leaving school at the age of 17 she was expected to get married and begin family life.

For a young woman who had done well at school and had dreamed of a bright future, she found that married life in her traditional culture curtailed her opportunities.

“I am a very hard-working woman,” she says. “My early marriage wasted all my dreams. I depended solely on the decisions of my husband, as is tradition here, although most of those decisions were very oppressive because it was even very difficult for me to interact with other members of the community.”

What changed Susan’s life was hearing about training held by the The Organisation for Children’s Harmony (TOCH). She heard about the training on the radio and was eager to take part. She found that it opened her eyes to what she could achieve in the community as a woman.

“My first training was an eye opener in regards to knowing what my rights as a woman are and how I could go ahead and claim them without causing conflict in the community,” she said.

The training encouraged women to get involved in leadership at all levels of their community. In a highly traditional society where women’s voices were not previously heard, this marked a big change for the women taking part in the training.

Following a TOCH advocacy campaign on gender equality, Susan was appointed as Deputy Director for the Land Survey Department.

“My appointment marked a very significant change in my life and family,” she says. “As a woman in leadership, there are a lot of challenges. We are looked down upon by men and disrespected by men who still dominate leadership positions. Our opinions as women are not considered. Women

are not brought to the table for decision-making, so to me it was a big challenge and continues to be.”

“I have learned a lot of things like knowing the meaning of gender-based violence, improving leadership, building peace among communities and neighbours, and also respect for others and women’s empowerment. I am much better in all aspects of life. I have developed new skills of creativity and innovation and how to help others. More specially, I began to know more about women’s rights, rule of law, and ways of convincing someone who is in conflict to forgive and be reconciled.”

“All things are possible through mercy. Let all women listen and be objective for their future, there are a lot of opportunities ahead and life will just get better every day for the women.”

### TRÓCAIRE'S APPROACH TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AND USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES:

Trócaire programmes adopt a number of key strategies to ensure that people living in poverty, particularly women, can exercise their right to access and control natural resources and benefit from the sustainable use and management of those resources:

- Gender-sensitive programming to address women's work burdens and barriers to natural resource access and control.
- Support communities to gain more detailed knowledge of their natural resources, including the

resource status, value their rights to those resources and to monitor both human-induced and natural threats and take appropriate action.

- Profile, document and map individual (where appropriate) and communal natural resources (including land, water and biodiversity).
- Strengthen local customary governance systems and statutory structures and ensure they are equitable, inclusive and accountable, and that policies and laws protect access to resources for rural women, men and communities.
- Seek formal legal recognition of women's, men's and communities'

control and management of the resources and of their resource rights, where applicable. Ensure women's access to natural resources is protected.

- Actively plan the use, conservation and management of natural resources in a sustainable, biodiverse manner based on agroecological principles.
- Advocate at local, national and international levels on policies and practices that threaten equitable access to and use of natural resources.

### Leading against the odds

Women play a crucial role in food production, processing, preparation and nutrition security. Given that women provide an estimated 85-90 percent of the time spent on these activities across various countries,<sup>73</sup> they hold valuable knowledge, skills and insights in these areas. Globally, one quarter of all active women engage in agricultural work.<sup>74</sup> In developing countries, women make up 43 percent of the agricultural labour force, with this figure ranging from up to 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent or more in parts of Africa and Asia.<sup>75</sup> Approximately two thirds of poor livestock keepers are women,<sup>76</sup> and women play a significant role in subsistence and commercial fishing, particularly at the processing and marketing stages.<sup>77</sup> Women have been key agents in implementing sustainable approaches to agricultural production, including

agroecological approaches that are accessible in terms of cost effectiveness, and have the potential to enable women to draw on their existing expertise (particularly related to seed conservation, plant and biodiversity expertise).<sup>78</sup> Such approaches can create meaningful and diverse work, requiring specialised skills and knowledge often held by women.<sup>79</sup>

In many contexts, women are closely connected to the environment and natural resources due to their traditional roles related to food production, caregiving and collection of fuel and water.<sup>80</sup> They hold key knowledge and skills needed to tackle environmental challenges,<sup>81</sup> and across the world they are leading in the design and implementation of actions to fight for natural resource and land rights, and addressing environmental degradation and climate change impacts.<sup>82</sup>

Indigenous women often play an essential role as stewards of nature,<sup>83</sup> hold traditional knowledge, skills, expertise and methods related to food security and their environments, and play a vital role in preparing for and responding to the impacts of climate change.<sup>84</sup> Women are organising responses to climate change impacts, connecting with communities to preserve their environments, leading on solid waste management and recycling efforts, and air pollution reduction campaigns.<sup>85</sup> Women are continuing to lead on increasing women's access to and ownership of land, bolstered by SDG 5 on Gender Equality, which highlights the need to "undertake reforms to give women equal ... access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws."<sup>86</sup>



## Protecting, respecting and fulfilling women's resource rights

Despite the immense gains that women have made in environmental protection, local, national and global environmental decision-making continues to be dominated by men, depriving environmental policy making of the insights and expertise of half the population.<sup>87</sup> Women also continue to face challenges in accessing and benefitting from resource rights to the same extent that men do, with laws frequently granting unequal inheritance and property ownership rights to women. States and other stakeholders have obligations under international and national law to ensure that women have equal access to land and productive resources.<sup>88</sup> However, in practice, national policies and laws related to agriculture (and particularly those on land ownership) often fail to safeguard women at the local level due to discriminatory norms and customs, the limited visibility of women's work, income and education limitations, and care work responsibilities.<sup>89</sup>

## We call on all governments, in particular Ireland, to:

- **Secure women's access to land by:**
  - Supporting and fully implementing the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, in particular paragraphs 5.4 and 5.5 committing States to take measures to ensure that legal and policy frameworks provide adequate protection for women and that laws that recognise women's tenure rights are implemented and enforced.
- **Support gender equitable and sustainable approaches to agriculture by:**
  - Supporting and enabling the transition to sustainable agricultural and food systems through agroecological approaches to increase smallholder farmers' resilience, and in particular women's resilience, to the impacts of climate change.
- **Ensure the meaningful participation of women in decision-making on food, agriculture and climate change at all levels,** including at the Committee on Food Security, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and national and international processes related to the delivery and review of the Sustainable Development Goals.

## LIGIA MONGE NICARAGUA

**For Ligia Monge (52), nothing is more important than women working together.**

“We must work on the concept of sisterhood,” she says. “We have to join together. Often we are separated for different reasons, but we must develop skills and seek alternatives to move forward.”

This is a belief she has put into practice for over 20 years working on community development.

An agronomist by profession, she is a recognised leader in Condega, a municipality in northern Nicaragua. She is co-founder of the Octupan Community Association, and is also its Executive Coordinator.

“Our mission is to support processes that enable people to negotiate and find alternative solutions to their problems,” she says. “We build capacities so people can manage their own community development. We focus our efforts on developing women’s abilities.”

Ligia explains the two types of support Octupan provides: training

in organisation, leadership, management, lobbying and public policies, and technical assistance for agroecological productive processes being carried out by women and youth. Both areas include working to promote access to land for rural women.

Ligia has been active in social causes since a young age.

“Before I worked with Octupan, I was involved in community organising,” she says. “In the 1980s I worked in a war zone, which helped me define myself as a person.

“In the 1990s, I continued working in rural zones with an agricultural development project.”

During these experiences she learned about the challenges facing women and poor farmers. She soon decided to join with other colleagues to form Octupan.

“We began working on rural development using the campesino-to-campesino methodology, while

simultaneously promoting women’s involvement, so they would have access to productive resources,” says Ligia.

She sees generating opportunities for women as key. She explains that they have recently developed two projects with support from Trócaire: ‘Land for women, opportunities for life’ and ‘Sustainable livelihoods for rural women and youth’.

Promoting women’s access to land is part of both projects, through two mechanisms: financing land purchases and financing rentals. Organic seeds are also provided to support productive diversification, thereby promoting agroecological practices.

A major challenge is pressuring the government to allocate funds to create a fund for gender equity in land purchases by rural women. A regulation to do so was approved in 2010, but no funds from the National Budget have been disbursed to make it operational.

Ligia indicates that sharing with rural women “has helped me to better understand the rural reality, the reality of rural women, and has given me the opportunity to develop my identity as a woman.”







## LIBERATE MUKANZIHIRA RWANDA

**Liberate Mukanzihira (61) and her family rely on their small patch of land in southern Rwanda to produce a living,** but a lack of fertile land means it can be difficult to make ends meet.

She supported her husband, Dismas, in helping to farm their land but never felt confident to take a lead within the home or the community. That changed when she became involved in the Food Security and Climate Change Project carried out by Caritas Gikongoro with the support of Trócaire.

This provided Liberat and her family with a rainwater harvesting and storage tank to support farming activities all year round, good quality seeds and technical training in soil fertility improvement and more effective farming techniques. This allowed Liberat to improve the fertility of the land and boost her income thanks to increased yields.

Liberat's participation in the project has helped not only from a practical point of view,

however. Thanks to the new skills she learned, she has gained confidence in herself and her role in the family, and has started to become progressively more involved in several community activities.

Liberat is now an active and reputable community leader in her capacity as a member of the Village Water and Climate Change Committee and chairperson of a farming working group. She took part in further leadership and technical training and is helping to drive a mapping exercise of water-related issues in her community to hold the authorities to account. She has become more aware of her rights and has overcome her fear to take an active role in the community, and now balances the aspects of her life as a farmer, mother, wife and leader.

"Women should produce something instead of depending on someone else for everything, and they should have their own income," she says. "This is the only way women can gain the

confidence they need to speak out and advocate for their rights and roles in the household and in the community. This is my best advice for every person in my situation."

This strong belief is what has pushed her to take her action even further.

"I now provide advice to other women in issues related both to farming and to their rights," says Liberat. "And, together with my colleagues from the different committees I am part of, we share reports and facilitate conversations with the authorities when there is a problem, as we did with the water pollution issue of our river."

Liberat now looks to the future with hope. She plans to continue to increase the income of her household by growing more vegetables to sell at the local market. Moreover, she wants to rebuild their kitchen and, perhaps, buy a small animal to help her and her husband financially when they will no longer be able to farm.

## 5. WOMEN ACTIVISTS ON SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is one of the most pervasive and detrimental human rights violations affecting women worldwide.

Often categorised into four broad categories - physical, sexual, psychological and economic - it is estimated that one in three women worldwide have experienced SGBV in their lifetimes.<sup>90</sup> SGBV hinders women's and girls' access to education, secure employment and decision-making within the household and community.<sup>91</sup> Not only do social inequalities drive SGBV, SGBV also perpetuates these inequalities by negatively impacting women's lives.<sup>92</sup> SGBV can lead to femicide, suicide, maternal mortality, physical injuries, transmission of sexually-transmitted infections, reproductive complications, poor mental wellbeing and drug abuse, among other impacts.<sup>93</sup> SGBV survivors must also deal with stigmatisation and marginalisation by families, communities, employers and society at large.

While laws are an important step towards ending SGBV, implementation of laws and policies remains weak in many contexts, and effectiveness is often limited by a number of challenges, including funding to tackle SGBV. The many barriers to ensuring effective legal protection and access to justice include the fact that women may not know that they can report SGBV (and may not wish to considering social norms and potential repercussions), and perpetrators remaining undeterred by legal penalties that they are either unaware of, are too small to act

as deterrents, or which are not implemented in practice.<sup>94</sup> Limited access to justice, and conflicting customary and religious laws can also be a challenge to the implementation of SGBV laws.

SGBV survivors have the right to effectively coordinated, quality services that are accessible, appropriate, non-discriminatory and based upon their needs and safety. However, the availability and implementation of such SGBV response services remain inadequate. In rural areas, in particular, survivors often face limited policing services and law enforcement, a lack of relevant health facilities and services, and limited public transportation to urban centres where appropriate services are more likely to be available.<sup>95</sup> In some situations, a woman's economic dependency on her partner and absence of other means of financial support can be a significant risk factor for SGBV.<sup>96</sup>

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**The women's movement is at the forefront of activism against SGBV, leading the fight against violence at household, community, national and global levels**

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Laws and policies alone do not address SGBV since combating this issue involves also transforming the social norms, beliefs, attitudes and practices that affect gender inequalities and SGBV.<sup>97</sup> For example, notwithstanding the growth in pro-women legislation from 2008 onwards in Pakistan, significant legislative gaps persist, as well as inadequate orientation and resourcing by those responsible for tackling violence against women and girls. The growth in SGBV-related legislation has outstripped the resources available to progress and deliver upon the provisions of such legislation. Often, sustained social and political will has not been secured, resulting in a tendency to treat passing legislation as the end in itself, rather than pressing for implementation.

### Leading against the odds

The women's movement is at the forefront of activism against SGBV, leading the fight against violence at household, community, national and global levels, with SGBV now recognised as a global and public health issue.<sup>98</sup> Women are working to prevent SGBV from occurring, to support survivors and provide services, to speak out and hold perpetrators accountable, to transform attitudes and to enforce laws that protect against SGBV.<sup>99</sup>

At the national level, women across the globe have led the call



for the introduction of legislation against SGBV, resulting in 154 countries having laws on sexual harassment and 144 with explicit domestic violence legislation,<sup>100</sup> compared to almost none 25 years ago.<sup>101</sup> Women have led the push on global and regional commitments against SGBV, with the Sustainable Development Goals including a target to “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation” by 2030.<sup>102</sup> States have subscribed to specific commitments and obligations in the area of women’s rights. Those are included within the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In this context, it is also useful to recall the 1992 General Recommendation No. 19 on violence against women, which explains, *inter alia*, the nature and scope of this human rights violation.

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**The #MeToo movement went viral in October 2017, demonstrating the ubiquity of sexual violence and bringing grassroots work to the global arena to help reframe the conversation and remove the stigma of experiencing sexual violence**

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Women have also fought for the introduction of instruments at the regional level, including the 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), the 2002 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Convention on Preventing and Combating the Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution, the 2003 The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

At the global level, women are leading various campaigns against SGBV. These include the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign, which takes place every year to emphasise that violence against women is a human rights violation, and to reinforce that eliminating such violence is a human rights issue.<sup>103</sup> The One Billion Rising is the largest mass action to end violence against women, bringing together women and men from across the world to raise their voices to demand an end to violence against women.<sup>104</sup> The #MeToo movement went viral in October 2017, demonstrating the ubiquity of sexual violence and bringing grassroots work to the global arena to help reframe the conversation and remove the stigma of experiencing sexual violence.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the prevalence of SGBV, response services are often underfunded, with survivors bearing the negative impacts of this. In humanitarian contexts in particular, insufficient funds significantly impede effective and timely response.<sup>106</sup> Protection interventions through bilateral donors and pooled funds are estimated to be around 3-4 percent of all humanitarian spending. Looking at spending on SGBV interventions within the protection funding, an analysis of Country-based Pooled Funds from 2014-16 found that SGBV interventions received at most 30 percent of protection funding, and a maximum of 3 percent of total pooled funds.<sup>107</sup> This reflects a lack of political will and a general absence of genuine commitment by States and organisations alike to tackle and address the root causes and consequences of SGBV.

# MARÍA FELÍCITA LOPEZ

## HONDURAS

### **María Felícita Lopez knows all too well the risks facing girls and women in Honduras.**

At the age of six she experienced sexual violence. She was also regularly bullied by an aunt. When she was 11 years old there was an attempt to force her into marriage. At that point, she ran away to La Paz, where she started working as a maid.

Despite her difficult childhood, Felícita was determined to improve her life. She enrolled in evening school and became involved in the Lenca Indigenous Independent Movement of La Paz (MILPAH). She found that she wanted to contribute to the organisation but she felt that she lacked the confidence and knowledge to do so.

She credits a training delivered by Fondo ACI and Trócaire for helping her lose the fear to speak up. Today, she participates in trainings that support her to defend the rights of Lenca women.

Through this, she feels that she has developed skills to sensitise other people, as well as having increased her knowledge on laws and on the existing support mechanisms where one can appeal.

“There is a lot of difference in my life after receiving trainings,” she says. “Before I was shy, could not talk, I was scared to go out. Now I feel an empowered woman. I speak when I feel I ought to; I take the spaces that I believe are ours, of the women. I say what is fine and what is not. I don’t remain silent.”

Her work to accompany and advise women who suffer violence in the communities has

not always been easy, as she has been discriminated and threatened by these women’s families and even by her own.

Aware of the risks that people addressing such issues can face, Trócaire works to support partners to identify and mitigate these risks. Despite the obstacles and challenges, she believes in the importance of the work she does as she wants to prevent women from experiencing violence like she has. Within the organisation, she fights for the right of women to participate, to become empowered as leaders, and to contribute to the eradication of violence.

“I would like that more women receive these trainings,” she says. “That they were invited to a workshop, that they don’t stay at home, that they participate.

If they don’t, they will miss out on many things. I wish that women were united. We cannot accept the violence against us; our daughters cannot go through the same situation that we have been through.”

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**“...Now I feel an empowered woman. I speak when I feel I ought to; I take the spaces that I believe are ours, of the women. I say what is fine and what is not. I don’t remain silent.”**

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# KAYTHI MYINT THEIN

## MYANMAR



**In a country where gender roles are very traditional and violence against women and girls is common,** it takes bravery to dedicate your life to working for gender equality. However, that is exactly what Kaythi Myint Thein has chosen to do.

Kaythi is Deputy Director of the Gender Equality Network in Myanmar. The Gender Equality Network (GEN) is a group of organisations in Myanmar that are active on women's rights. While Myanmar is a traditional and conservative country, it is also a country in transition. GEN and its members are campaigning for a more equal society.

Kaythi is 36 years old and is married with a young baby son. She has been working with GEN for five years. Although her background isn't in women's leadership, her work with GEN has transformed her life. She says she loves working with GEN and feels she is "working from the heart".

Kaythi says that GEN "collects voices from members and

transfers those voices into policy change".

According to Kaythi, the organisation's greatest success has been building up the network to include over one hundred organisations active on women's rights. The collective action of the network has put significant pressure on the government, which has resulted in the introduction of a governmental plan on women's equality, and the development of draft legislation to protect women from violence.

The introduction of a bill on prevention of violence against women is a significant milestone. If passed, it will bring in important protections for women affected by violence. However, it is still in draft form, and there are worries that the final law may be watered down.

GEN has played an important role in advising lawmakers on the drafting of the law. Kaythi says the current draft of the law contains about "60 percent of the provisions they would like to see"

including provisions on domestic violence, consent, incest and stalking. However, they would like to see the definition of rape explicitly include marital rape, and for the law to cover sexual violence in Myanmar's armed conflicts.

When asked whether the situation is improving in Myanmar for women, Kaythi is cautiously optimistic. She says there is no doubt that there has been progress, and that the government has begun to implement the 'National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women'. The government has also started to act on international recommendations regarding implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

However, challenges remain, and the government is slow to act. Women's equality is not the highest priority of the Myanmar government, and there is backlash against civil society groups like GEN for standing up and having a voice, particularly on violence against women and girls in conflict-affected areas of Myanmar.

For Kaythi, she stays motivated to work for gender equality in her country. She draws her strength to keep campaigning for equality from the courageous women who have inspired her in her life. She mentions the Director of GEN who has "strength and courage but can also be emotional and cry". Such strong women inspire Kaythi to keep working for gender equality.



## ANCILLA UZAMUKUNDA RWANDA

**Ancilla Uzamukunda's life dramatically changed 24 years ago** when, during the genocide in Rwanda, she fled her home and lost contact with her husband.

She had only recently given birth to her only child and was now alone, isolated and without any means to provide for herself and her newborn daughter. The fear she felt for the future was almost unbearable.

"My life started again when I got something which motivated me to get out of my house," Ancilla says.

Thanks to the Women's Empowerment Programme run by Trócaire in partnership with the Commission Diocésaine Justice et Paix (CDJP) Gikongoro, she started to spend more time among others and to tear down the wall of isolation that had built.

"I got interested in different topics, such decision-making rights for women and gender-based violence," she says. "I started to tell myself, 'If I am part

of something, if I know my rights, why not become a decision maker in my community?'"

The final push was when there was the need for people to join a community group in charge of reporting gender-based violence (GBV) cases to the authorities. The requirements were to be an active community member and an upright individual: qualities that many people felt that Ancilla embodied. And thanks to her newly gained self-confidence, she agreed to be a candidate and was eventually elected.

"I am now extremely motivated by the fact that members of my community trust me and see me as a guide when it comes to women-related issues," Ancilla proudly declares.

She has since handled several sensitive cases, helping to link people with the relevant authorities and support services within the community, as well as to an effective peer support network.

"These successes have made me even more committed," she says. "Now I lead what we call accountability meetings, which are really helpful when we are facing problems we don't have the capacity to directly address. My life has a new meaning now, through my service to the community".

Ancilla is now actively engaged in a GBV mapping exercise within her village, with much more to come.

When asked about any advice she could give to women in the same situation across the world, Ancilla has no doubt that everything is about empowerment: "Everyone has both rights and capacities, and if you decide to do, you will do. And no one should lose hope because opportunities are out there. If you go out, meet people and engage in something meaningful, you will regain your life."



## TRÓCAIRE'S APPROACH TO TACKLING SGBV AS BOTH A CAUSE AND EFFECT OF WOMEN'S DISEMPOWERMENT:

Trócaire's programmes support survivors of SGBV in both development and humanitarian contexts to access services including legal aid, vocational training, counselling and medical services, as well as advocating at local, national and international levels for gender-equitable policies and practices. Trócaire programmes adopt a number of strategies to tackle SGBV:

- Support women and girl survivors and those at risk of SGBV through women's and girls' safe spaces within communities.
- Mobilise community-based response services to address the psychosocial support, medical, legal and social support needs of women affected by SGBV and HIV.
- Strengthen the availability and accessibility of specialised response services for SGBV and HIV to address acute needs of SGBV survivors.
- Mobilise communities and engage family members, groups and change-makers to challenge norms and values that disempower women and facilitate SGBV.
- Support women-centred organisations to influence social norms and advocate for laws and policies that support women's empowerment and end SGBV.
- Conduct gender-specific research and analysis to support programming and advocacy objectives.

## In light of the unacceptably high levels of SGBV and inadequate services for survivors, we call on all governments, and in particular Ireland, to:

- **Ensure adequate and effective SGBV response services, by:**
  - Providing sufficient funding for and support the effective implementation of multi-disciplinary survivor-centred SGBV response services.
  - Ensuring SGBV response services are accessible to all those who need to access them, of high quality, appropriate and non-discriminatory. These services should be designed and provided based on the needs of SGBV survivors.
- **Step up efforts to respond to and prevent SGBV, by:**
  - Fully resourcing the implementation of the commitments made as part of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including those related to violence against women.
- **Increase funding for protection and SGBV interventions in humanitarian contexts:**
  - Funding should be provided to initiatives and organisations that work with girls and adolescents to empower them with increased resilience in the face of crises.
  - Calls for proposals should prioritise SGBV prevention and response, and donors should invest in such endeavours from the onset of emergencies with transparent funding streams to allow for tracking of investments in SGBV efforts.<sup>108</sup>
- Fully realise the commitments made through becoming a partner of the **Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies** and the **GBV-related commitments of the World Humanitarian Summit**,<sup>109</sup> including increasing and diversifying the country's gender portfolio.

## AFROZE BANO PAKISTAN

**Afroze Bano (25) is from a small village in Sindh province in Pakistan** where women are taught from a young age that they have fewer rights than men.

Girls are denied education and are not even permitted to go outside the house. All decisions – even what clothes women can wear – are made by male family members. Afroze felt frustrated by this. She wanted to stand against these discriminatory attitudes, but felt helpless. When she dared to speak, she was silenced by men.

In order to be able to speak out, she decided to become economically self-reliant. A neighbour informed her about Sindh Development Society and their Learning Resource Centre (LRC) for vocational skills training for women in the community. She sought her father's permission to go to the LRC. At first her father would not allow her to attend but, seeing how persistent she was, finally gave his permission.

She had been keen since childhood to learn tailoring skills, reasoning that through tailoring she could provide a service to other women of the community and contribute to her family's income. At the LRC, she sharpened her skills in sewing, cutting, designing and stitching, and built her knowledge about women's human rights.

Taking the action to break social norms by obtaining skills and knowledge was not always easy.

"My family's ignorant behaviour used to hurt me a lot and at one stage I decided to quit my struggle," she said. "But at the same time, I thought that this is my right to obtain skills and



education and there is nothing wrong with this."

She had a dream; she wanted to do something for herself and other girls in her area. Her ambitions did not stop her from fighting the discriminatory attitude of her family. She took this struggle out to the street, to the school, to the community centres. Whoever she met, she tried to convince them to enrol their daughters to learn at the LRC. In the beginning, people thought that she was provoking girls to rebel. Gradually, after seeing her success, people started allowing their female relatives to attend the LRC.

Afroze formed a group of young women and they started speaking out against gender-based violence and for improved women's rights and laws. She saw that a lack of access to education made women more vulnerable to violence, so she continued to encourage women to attend classes and trainings.

Eventually, she succeeded in establishing her own vocational training and display centre. Since she was economically self-reliant, she negotiated her marriage with her father. Her future husband

agreed that she could work for the community and earn money through her skills centre.

"Now I am a successful woman and vocational teacher," she says. "I feel that I am well educated because I am aware of my rights. I run my business with confidence and earn approximately 7-8,000 rupees every month. My husband realises that I am equal to him."

Afroze says that women should challenge society's harmful customary practices and typical thinking about degrading women. She believes that if a woman is motivated, no hindrance can stop her.

"I am a role model for those women who have a lot of challenges to face and wish to achieve something on their own," she says.

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**"...I thought that this is my right to obtain skills and education and there is nothing wrong with this."**

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# GERTRUDE MATYEKA

## ZIMBABWE

**As a child Gertrude Matyeka would often sleep outside with her mother to avoid her father's violent temper.** Now aged 62, Gertrude uses these early experiences to support her community.

In 2010 Gertrude spearheaded the establishment of a women's bakery in her community. She led 28 women to acquire commercial land and constructed a bakery at Watsomba Business Centre. Following this she became popular among the community and government ministries for her work to promote women's empowerment and was often invited to attend trainings organised by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development. In 2012 Women in Leadership Southern Africa engaged with her as a Community Opinion Popular Leader.

In the same year, the Ministry established a community structure called the Gender Advisory Group that dealt with gender issues in the community, and Gertrude was invited to join the Group. Gertrude is committed to using the leadership skills she has learned to make sure young girls in her village do not have the same experiences as she had as a child.

In 2017 Gertrude participated in trainings on gender-based violence (GBV) prevention using the SASA! Faith approach. Following this she became a SASA! Faith team member and community activist, and supports her community to speak about GBV. She has also become a mentor to community activists who facilitate conversations on GBV in their communities. Gertrude walks long distances to

make sure she reaches each and every person in the community with information on GBV and counselling services. Wherever she goes in the community people greet her as "Mai Mhizhonganga" (Mrs. GBV). She says there are many GBV issues such as child marriages and domestic violence that require intervention.

Although she refers some cases to service providers such as the police, many of her clients feel too intimidated to seek assistance. Another challenge faced is men who think that gender equality is about disempowering men and promoting rebellion by women against men. These men want to close down conversations on women's issues as they see them as a threat to men.

Despite all these challenges she is happy that the community now recognises the efforts to end violence against women. As a member of the SASA! Faith team, she believes that the activities they conduct have an impact on them as individuals which causes them to self-reflect and being part of this team has enabled her to identify her power within.

Gertrude feels her participation in the project has empowered her to lead, interact with the community and external stakeholders, and has given her a form of social healing.

With this new sense of self-esteem, Gertrude works to support other women to recognise their power and build their self-esteem. "I inspire other women to be positive in life because women are agents of change and they have the power to achieve greatness. I do not need anything now more than the strength to continue what I am doing until I leave this earth."

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**"I inspire other women to be positive in life because women are agents of change and they have the power to achieve greatness."**

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## LLUDELLY ABURTO NICARAGUA

**Lludely Aburto (52) is Executive Director of the Local Network,** a federation of 23 organisations working on social development in different municipalities throughout Nicaragua.

For her, leadership has always been a skill she was interested in pursuing.

“I was a student leader, and then a youth leader of various groups,” she says. “I was president of the Nicaraguan Youth Council, and I’ve been involved in processes building women’s capacities during my adult professional life.”

The Local Network joins different social organisations made up of some of the most vulnerable groups, seeking development opportunities to improve their living conditions. These include poor farmers, indigenous groups, feminists, ecologists, youth, and others.

“My role is to get people excited and contribute my skills to help strengthen organisational development. It’s also to promote encounters with others who are not part of the groups,” she explains.

Trócaire has supported many different programmes over the last ten years. Lludely highlights a recent course about social innovation as being particularly important. She explains that it was a process that broke certain paradigms, since it shed light on the range of innovative perspectives driving the work of organisations to support social development.

“Social innovation was a new method for formulating projects from new perspectives, and



acquiring tools for analysing the context,” she says

Lludely believes that the most important part of the process was that “it allowed us to acknowledge our realities and visions as organisations.” Moreover, she adds, “to a large extent we were able to transform obstacles into possibilities.”

Over 40 projects focused on violence, child labour and the environment were the outcome of this process.

Returning to the topic of promoting female leadership, she indicates that the goals of organisations that make up the Local Network include developing the skills of women in different territories.

“We are working in 80 municipalities of the country, and performance is good because women’s leadership is being strengthened,” she notes.

However, she warns that it is not always easy, because women confront many challenges. Many are affected by unequal power relations, which also includes violence: “We must situate ourselves in a dynamic of balanced peer relations with men.”

In reference to what she has learned over the years, she insists that “all of the processes I have experienced and the tools I have acquired place me in a special position where I can be rational without losing touch with my emotions.” In this sense, she adds that finding a balance is useful for getting along. “It’s important to recognise that we are not right all of the time, and that there are different truths.”

Her hope for the future “is that all Nicaraguans can join together to move our country forward. I have hope that we will be able to rebuild democracy, and refashion ourselves as women, as men, and as young people. This is what our work should focus on.”

Lludely admits that her motivations to continue are “my children, my grandchildren and the desire to see this country move in a positive direction.”

## 6. WOMEN AT THE FRONTLINE OF RESPONDING TO HUMANITARIAN CRISES

Disasters and crises impact women, men, girls and boys differently, as they all have different needs, capacities and coping mechanisms.<sup>110</sup>

Disasters and the effects of climate change have greater impacts on the poorest populations,<sup>111</sup> disproportionately impacting women who comprise 70 percent of the world's poor.<sup>112</sup> Gender dynamics – including cultural norms and the division of labour, roles, resources and power – can also limit the resources and capacities of women to respond when a crisis hits,<sup>113</sup> and can be further compounded by other intersecting vulnerabilities such as poverty, race and disability.<sup>114</sup> Natural disasters lower the life expectancy of women more than that of men (by killing more women, or killing women at an earlier age than men), with this being especially pronounced for women with lower socioeconomic status.<sup>115</sup> Sixty percent of preventable maternal deaths occur in conflict, displacement and natural disaster contexts.<sup>116</sup> During the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, for example, four times as many women than men lost their lives in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka because women were not taught how to climb trees and swim at a young age, while men were – skills which saved many lives.<sup>117</sup>

Women are more likely to suffer from malnutrition during disasters as they are more inclined to make sacrifices for the benefit of their families, such as eating less food during times of scarcity,<sup>118</sup> in addition to having specific nutritional needs when pregnant or lactating.<sup>119</sup>

SGBV-related risks can intensify after a crisis for a variety of reasons (SGBV affects over 70 percent of women in some crisis settings<sup>120</sup>), including displacement, resource scarcity, an increase in militarised environments, a breakdown of protections at community and State levels, disruptions to services and infrastructure, changing sociocultural and gender norms, disrupted family and support networks, and a disproportionately severe impact on women's psychosocial wellbeing.<sup>121</sup> Negative coping mechanisms and risky survival strategies may also be employed during a crisis, which may lead to early/forced marriage, child labour and trafficking.<sup>122</sup> Despite safeguarding efforts, challenges remain in implementation, and children and vulnerable adults may face harm, abuse and mistreatment in humanitarian response.

Women tend to have less access to or control of assets that would help in coping with disaster events.<sup>123</sup> In addition, when humanitarian actors assess loss of assets after a crisis, the focus tends to be on typically 'male' material assets (such as housing and agricultural land) rather than those lost by women, including not only kitchen utensils, sewing machines and small animals, but also physical and psychological strains on women's ability to cope, thereby leading to an underestimation of the impact on women.<sup>124</sup>

Men are more likely to be given preferential treatment in rescue efforts in places where there are existing patterns of gender discrimination.<sup>125</sup> Women often face unequal access to humanitarian assistance,<sup>126</sup> in part due to lack of participation at the decision-making table, power dynamics, restrictions on mobility and access to public spaces.<sup>127</sup> Women may also have specific sanitation, security, privacy and child-related requirements during a humanitarian response.<sup>128</sup>

### Leading against the odds

Coordinated humanitarian action has shifted the view of women as victims towards women as first responders, and acknowledged the important role of women and local women's groups in humanitarian action,<sup>129</sup> a perspective underscored by the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. The Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and the related Roadmap have emphasised the importance of this, providing a framework to foster accountability and mitigate SGBV risks in humanitarian contexts.<sup>130</sup>

Women, being among the first responders to crises and bringing with them contextual knowledge and community mobilisation skills, contribute vital insights, resources and experiences to emergency preparedness and response. In the protection sector especially, women comprise the majority of frontline responders.<sup>131</sup>

Their leadership and participation in decision-making contributes to improved disaster preparedness and risk reduction, humanitarian responses and inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding.<sup>132</sup> Grassroots women's organisations are well placed to lead on mobilising change, finding solutions and contributing to more effective and efficient responses,<sup>133</sup> often responding to humanitarian crises in locations that could not be reached by international agencies.<sup>134</sup> Women also play key roles in supporting community members to survive, manage and adjust to crises.<sup>135</sup> The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and subsequent related resolutions highlight the importance of women's agency in achieving

sustainable peace. Indeed, Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2015-2018) includes a commitment to supporting the empowerment of women in fragile and humanitarian contexts to improve their participation and representation in decision-making.<sup>136</sup>

Currently, just 0.4 percent of reported international humanitarian funding is being channelled directly to national and local NGOs.<sup>137</sup> There is an urgent need for a more locally-rooted, gender-sensitive humanitarian response that leverages the responsibilities and capacities of States, civil society and affected communities, including women and women-centred organisations. To support local civil society in humanitarian

settings, it is necessary to encourage international partners to move towards an institutional strengthening approach, to support the coordination of local NGOs in order to strengthen civil society and its links for advocacy, and to foster local learning and experience exchange between local and international actors.<sup>138</sup> Calls across the sector for greater localisation of humanitarian responses, which are rooted in, and led by, local communities, reinforce our core commitment to working through local civil society organisations and networks.

Despite their specific perspectives, contributions and needs, women often remain excluded from disaster preparedness and response decision-making processes and activities.<sup>139</sup>

### **TRÓCAIRE'S APPROACH TO PROTECTING WOMEN AND GIRLS, AND SUPPORTING LOCALISED RESPONSES, IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES:**

In humanitarian crises, we know that human rights are undermined; risks of violence, coercion and discrimination are exacerbated; livelihoods are quickly eroded and women are disproportionately affected. Trócaire has therefore identified Protection, in particular Protection of Women and Girls, as a priority focus within our humanitarian work: helping to protect physical integrity, dignity and psychosocial wellbeing, in addition to providing material assistance, during crises. We take a broad-based, multi-level and multi-sectoral approach to protection programming that includes psychosocial support, prevention, mitigation and response. In this, we build on local capacities and resources and we support

approaches that are women-led and survivor-centred. Protection mainstreaming principles, including do no harm, participation, meaningful access and accountability, underpin all our work.

- Trócaire responds to humanitarian crises in partnership with local organisations, both faith-based and secular. Our partnerships are built on the core values of solidarity, participation, perseverance, courage and accountability. Local organisations are the first on the ground in an emergency and often have the best access to crisis-affected communities in remote and insecure environments. Local organisations are best placed to identify communities' underlying vulnerabilities, capacities and priorities, and are therefore uniquely

positioned to strengthen local communities' capacity to prepare for, withstand and recover from crisis or stress.

- Despite this, it is vital for Trócaire to fully examine and understand the power dynamics and structures within a given community not to further exacerbate inequalities and empower one group to the detriment of another.
- As a signatory to the Charter4Change, Trócaire has joined a range of national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in an initiative that intends to shift the way the humanitarian system operates to enable first responders at local and national levels to play an increased and more prominent role in humanitarian response.



The barriers to exercising their agency in crisis scenarios as reported by women include their limited participation in the public sphere due to gender norms and patriarchal attitudes, low self-confidence and limited experience in leadership opportunities, exclusion from decision-making structures, their unpaid workload, education levels, poverty and limited access to resources.<sup>140</sup> Within humanitarian organisations themselves, there are over two thirds men to less than one third women in senior management roles, limiting women's representation in humanitarian leadership.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, insufficient funds are made available for grassroots women's rights organisations and gender-responsive humanitarian action.<sup>142</sup>

**We call on all governments and humanitarian actors, in particular Ireland, to:**

- **Increase the participation of women and women-led organisations in disaster preparedness and response:**
  - All humanitarian actors, including States, the UN and NGOs, should ensure the full and meaningful inclusion and participation of women in decision-making related to disaster preparedness and response, including their representation on disaster preparedness and response committees and camp management committees.
- **Fully deliver on the Grand Bargain commitments to the localisation of humanitarian aid, by:**
  - Increasing and supporting 'multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders through collaboration with development partners and incorporating capacity strengthening in partnership agreements'. This should include a particular focus on women-led organisations and on the capacity strengthening priorities of women responders.
  - Ensuring 25 percent of humanitarian funding is provided to local and national actors by 2020.<sup>143</sup>
- **Increase the participation of women and women-led organisations in Peace and Security:**
  - Build on the momentum of Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security to strengthen Ireland's commitment to UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Recognising the adverse effects of conflict on women and girls, ensure a particular focus on their critical role in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacebuilding and governance.
- **Increase funding for protection and SGBV interventions in humanitarian contexts:**
  - Provide sufficient funding for multi-disciplinary, survivor-centred SGBV prevention and response services, including funding for initiatives and organisations that work with girls and adolescents to empower them with increased resilience in the face of crises.
  - Calls for proposals should prioritise SGBV prevention and response, and donors should invest in such endeavours from the onset of emergencies with transparent funding streams to allow for tracking of investments in SGBV efforts.<sup>144</sup>
- Fully realise the commitments made through becoming a partner of the **Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies** and the **GBV-related commitments of the World Humanitarian Summit**.<sup>145</sup>

# NEYDA YOHENI MOLINA

## HONDURAS

**Neyda (25) knew the challenges facing people in her small community in northern Honduras** but shyness prevented her from getting involved in efforts to combat them. Men tended to lead community initiatives, with women not being able to take on prominent roles.

One day in 2013, Neyda decided to attend a meeting of the Local Emergency Committee (CODEL). The committee was looking for motivated people to create a youth committee. Neyda brushed her shyness aside and volunteered to be part of the board of directors.

“In the beginning it was very hard,” she says. “I didn’t have credibility for being a woman. I was considered unskilled, but after a certain time I started gaining self-confidence. Now they always choose me and other women to carry out tasks, to the point that the president of the board is a woman. And this motivates me since I feel that I gave my contribution to break the barrier where only men could cover certain roles.”

Since first joining the committee, she has become very involved with its work, eventually becoming coordinator of CODEL’s youth committee of her community.

Through her work with CODEL, Neyda has developed her leadership skills and learned how to speak comfortably in public. She teaches about personal safety in relation to natural disasters at kindergarten, as well as working with young people on a project that helps them earn money through retail.



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**“My life has changed a lot and I would like to transfer this enthusiasm to my kids, to the women, and to the young people that will come after me.”**

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What motivates her to be a leader is the will to support her community and to motivate young people to become involved in community organisations, as well as the opportunity to be a good example for her children. She teaches her family to live without fear, to speak up, and to value things in life. She has also enrolled in university to further build her knowledge.

Her work with CODEL has not been without its challenges. Neyda recalls how difficult it was to speak in public, to compromise during meetings, to leave her children for a long time and to gain credibility as a woman within the community.

Despite those challenges, Neyda has learned not only that men and women have the same potential and abilities, and that everyone should fight for the good of their communities, but also that it is precisely through the involvement in community organisations that a deeper change is possible. She strongly believes in a better future for the youth and women and in the importance of getting involved in empowerment processes and learning about their rights.

“My life has changed a lot and I would like to transfer this enthusiasm to my kids, to the women, and to the young people that will come after me” she says.

# MAKADA ZACKERIA BANGAZI

## SOUTH SUDAN

**Despite coming from a relatively comfortable background and receiving an education,** war and drought in South Sudan made it difficult for Makada Zackeria Bangazi (47) to survive.

Makada got married during the civil war between Sudan and South Sudan, and would survive on wild fruit and through tough, subsistence agricultural practices. She could spend 12 hours working to produce one family meal. In one day, Makada would walk to collect firewood, endure a five-mile walk to fetch five gallons of water, and spend three hours pounding hard sorghum for consumption, as well as cooking and bathing family members. She would only rest for four hours a day, rising early to make sure everything was ready for her family.

Living conditions in her home region of Gogrial State became so bad that she was forced to look for humanitarian assistance to feed her family.

In 2013 she joined a Daughters of

Mary Immaculate (DMI) group for women. This group offered training and support to build women's skills in areas such as leadership and public speaking. She also joined the DMI saving and lending group, which helps women access money.

"To free my family from hunger and poverty is the reason why I joined the DMI project scheme," she said.

Having a loan from the saving and loans group means Makada's living conditions have changed. The money she can save has enabled her to pay for her children's school fees, food supplies, clothing, accommodation and many other expenses.

Makada was supported with agricultural tools such as a sickle, spade, hoes, buckets and sorghum, okra, groundnuts, simsim and vegetable seeds from the DMI-funded project.

After attending a number of trainings with DMI, Makada

became an activist and peace ambassador for community reconciliation in Ayiel village. She regularly engages with and mobilises the people of her village on peace and reconciliation, and guides people to use peaceful approaches when resolving issues, such as talking as a means of solving grievances.

Makada has also built her confidence and is no longer shy when speaking before a crowd of people. She has developed skills on budgeting, planning and women's rights, and no longer tolerates the mistreatment of women by men. She shares her experience and skills with other women in the villages. Through working with the DMI to gain knowledge, as well as her recognition by and employment through the government, Makada's life has improved. Makada urges all women to come out of their kitchens and caution men who ignore them, so they can participate at all levels of governance.





# YVONNE AKI-SAWYERR

## SIERRA LEONE

### During the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, Yvonne Aki-Sawyers campaigned in the UK

to raise awareness and recruit individuals to volunteer in the Ebola Treatment Centres, and subsequently served as Director of Planning at the National Ebola Response Centre. Yvonne received an Ebola Gold Medal by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone in December 2015, and was appointed an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) by Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom in January 2016 for her efforts in the Ebola response.

Yvonne reflects that, “It is said that ‘leadership is the capacity to translate a vision into reality.’ I have seen and continue to see women from all walks of life, quietly and with determination, daily forging ahead in their spheres of influence doing precisely this – translating visions into reality. Leaders who are often not acknowledged as such but who are making a positive impact in the lives of many. As women, our ability to increase our impact, to translate more and bigger visions into reality will be enhanced by strengthening our networks and by remaining connected, by taking time to share our stories and by learning from each other’s experiences.”

Yvonne currently serves as Mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Born and bred in Freetown, Yvonne is a chartered accountant who is married with two children, a daughter and a son. Yvonne showed her passion for leadership from an early age, when she took on the role of Head Girl and Loreto House Captain at

St. Joseph’s Secondary School. While at university studying economics, Yvonne was elected as the first African on the International Exchange Committee of the International Association of Students in Economics and Management (AIESEC).

Yvonne pursued a career in the financial services industry, while also retaining her passion for sustainable development and remaining active in Sierra Leonean civil society space. This included advocating against the blood diamond industry, and campaigning for peace in Sierra Leone during the civil war.

Yvonne is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Sierra Leone War Trust, a charity she co-founded in 1999 whose mission is to work through partnerships to promote education, health, rehabilitation and self-sufficiency of children and youth in Sierra Leone through advocacy and the provision of financial and technical support. Speaking at a Recipes for Success event and referring to this time in her life and the need to balance family, professional and charitable commitments, Yvonne recalled, “I remember one day just saying ‘I can’t do this anymore’ ... but I couldn’t... I didn’t have the peace... so I kept going. And I really am so glad”.

Yvonne was previously Investment Director of the International Development Enterprise Associates (IDEA) Group, an infrastructure development company in Sierra Leone. Yvonne was also a director of ConsultIDEA, which created a leadership development programme to promote the leadership as an act of service in Sierra Leone.



Yvonne took part in the National Women in Elections Debate organised and broadcast by Trócaire partner, Campaign for Good Governance, ahead of the 2018 national elections, as part of their programming to promote leadership of women in Sierra Leone. Yvonne herself successfully ran in the March 2018 elections to become Mayor of Freetown with over 59 percent of the vote, beating five male contenders to the role, which had not been held by a woman since 1980. On undertaking the role of Mayor, Yvonne has shared:

“The bottom line is I believe women are as capable as men and should be given equal opportunities to demonstrate that capability and to hold positions of leadership. To me, it’s not a question of would a woman do it better? I think it’s a question of could a woman do it just as well? So there’s absolutely no reason why women shouldn’t be given a platform to lead.”

# 7. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper highlights the achievements and struggles of women around the world, while focusing on specific stories of women's leadership journeys.

Women's participation in decision-making at all levels, from the individual, to household, community, national and international levels, is a fundamental human right that continues to be violated around the world. Equally, specific gender-sensitive policies and practices in the areas of human rights, natural resource protection, food, nutrition, climate change response and humanitarian action can ensure more equitable outcomes for all.

This paper highlights the stories of women leaders from across the world. Their stories should serve to inspire and motivate us, against a backdrop of global commitments that have yet to be delivered and global movements that continue to build, gather momentum and bring about positive change for women, women's rights and all of society. Such collective action has been both a product of, and a contributor to, the increasing eminence of women in leadership roles, and brings about more positive policies and practices. More and more women are paving the way in areas including human rights defence, natural resource and environmental protection, SGBV and humanitarian response. We must continue to stand behind these women and call for action on women's rights, and to support women to become empowered as leaders and activists for a better future for us all.

The paper is a call for action to stand behind women, such as those featured in the case studies, to address the barriers to women's empowerment and leadership, in particular in the sectors that Trócaire works on.

## We call on all governments, and in particular Ireland, to:

- **Support the empowerment of women** as both a standalone issue and an issue that can be integrated throughout all government policies and strategies, by:
  - Supporting long-term programming on women's empowerment, working to increase participation of women in both the public and private sector and enhancing social inclusion and community building.
  - Pursuing legislative and judicial reforms to expand social protections to women and eliminating traditional barriers to their advancement, including ensuring that laws relating to access to resources (such as land) do not discriminate against women.
  - Ensuring progress on all targets under Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality, with a view to achieving the Goal by 2030.
- **Increase the political participation of women at all levels** to ensure that their knowledge and insights are incorporated into the design of policies, strategies and budgets, by:
  - Promoting the use of quotas at local and national levels with strict enforcement mechanisms, as well as multi-party democracies and proportional representation systems with large district magnitudes to maximise opportunities for women.<sup>146</sup>
  - Enacting measures to encourage and support women to participate in politics at all levels, including promoting parliamentary women's caucuses and ensuring that this is closely linked to and informed by local women's movements.
  - Taking measures to address factors that hinder women's political participation, including stigmatisation and harassment, inequitable distribution of domestic and care work, and gender gaps in educational attainment.

- **Increase funding to women’s rights and women-led organisations at local and national levels in development and humanitarian contexts by:**
  - Providing sufficient multi-annual funding for women’s rights and women-led organisations and supporting capacity strengthening and accompaniment where needed to strengthen organisational and technical capacities.<sup>147</sup>

### In the areas of human rights and democratic space:

- Promote greater participation of women and women-centred organisations in the **EU Country Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society process**, with a focus on the enabling environment, and contribute to their consistent implementation.
- **Contribute to more consistent implementation of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, including support for WHRDs by:**
  - Ensuring EU Missions pay attention to the work of HRDs and the challenges they encounter, with a specific focus on the risks faced by WHRDs.
  - Implementing the Guidelines in a way that ensures that WHRDs working in remote areas, or working unregistered or outside of networks have access to appropriate security measures when required.<sup>148</sup>

- Ensuring an environment where WHRDs can operate freely without risks of intimidation, harassment and sexual violence by State and non-State actors.<sup>149</sup>
- EU delegations meeting with representatives from the diplomatic and HRD communities to reflect, discuss and take action on the gender-specific protection needs of WHRDs in their mission countries.<sup>150</sup>
- Preparing local implementation strategies with a particular emphasis on WHRDs.<sup>151</sup>
- **Ensure full protection of human rights with respect to business, by:**
  - Adopting a United Nations Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights that includes strong language on the State’s obligation to **protect human rights defenders** working in the context of business activities, including establishing specific measures to protect human rights defenders against any form of criminalisation and obstruction to their work, including SGBV against women human rights defenders.
  - Fully, promptly and independently investigating and punishing attacks and intimidation against WHRDs and ensuring access to justice to reduce the current climate of impunity that many powerful companies enjoy.

- **Ireland should ensure the National Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAP) is adopted and implemented effectively, by:**
  - Ensuring the implementation plan is rooted in a comprehensive gender analysis to ensure that the NAP is appropriate for and responds to the different needs of women and men.
  - Including practical support for all businesses to ensure that they are in a position to implement the NAP to better respect human rights, including a focus on women’s rights. To this end, this should also include respect for decent employment and gender equitable labour laws.
  - Ensuring coherence between the implementation of the National Plan on Business and Human Rights and Ireland’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.
  - Supporting partner governments to ensure that business and economic regulation and legislation implement commitments to human rights including those related to gender equality, as well as providing support for the promotion of inclusive economic growth, including opportunities and outcomes for women.



### In the area of equitable access to and use of resources:

- **Secure women's access to land by:**
  - Supporting and fully implementing the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, in particular paragraphs 5.4 and 5.5 committing States to take measures to ensure that legal and policy frameworks provide adequate protection for women and that laws that recognise women's tenure rights are implemented and enforced.
- **Support gender equitable and sustainable approaches to agriculture by:**
  - Supporting and enabling the transition to sustainable agricultural and food systems through agroecological approaches to increase smallholder farmers' resilience, and in particular women's resilience, to the impacts of climate change.
- **Ensure the meaningful participation of women in decision-making on food, agriculture and climate change at all levels,** including at the Committee on Food Security, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and national and international processes related to the delivery and review of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### In the area of SGBV in development and humanitarian contexts:

- **Ensure adequate and effective SGBV response services, by:**
  - Providing sufficient funding for and support the effective implementation of multi-disciplinary survivor-centred SGBV response services.
  - Ensuring SGBV response services are accessible to all those who need to access them, of high quality, appropriate and non-discriminatory. These services should be designed and provided based on the needs of SGBV survivors.
- **Step up efforts to respond to and prevent SGBV, by:**
  - Fully resourcing the implementation of the commitments made as part of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including those related to violence against women.

### • Increase funding for protection and SGBV interventions in humanitarian contexts:

- Funding should be provided to initiatives and organisations that work with girls and adolescents to empower them with increased resilience in the face of crises.
- Calls for proposals should prioritise SGBV prevention and response, and donors should invest in such endeavours from the onset of emergencies with transparent funding streams to allow for tracking of investments in SGBV efforts.<sup>152</sup>
- Fully realise the commitments made through becoming a partner of the **Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies** and the **GBV-related commitments of the World Humanitarian Summit**,<sup>153</sup> including increasing and diversifying the country's gender portfolio.

### **In the area of responding to humanitarian crises:**

- **Increase the participation of women and women-led organisations in disaster preparedness and response:**

- All humanitarian actors, including States, the UN and NGOs, should ensure the full and meaningful inclusion and participation of women in decision-making related to disaster preparedness and response, including their representation on disaster preparedness and response committees and camp management committees.

- **Fully deliver on the Grand Bargain commitments to the localisation of humanitarian aid, by:**

- Increasing and supporting 'multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders through collaboration with development partners and incorporating capacity strengthening in partnership agreements'. This should include a particular focus on women-led organisations and on the capacity strengthening priorities of women responders.
- Ensuring 25 percent of humanitarian funding is provided to local and national actors by 2020.<sup>154</sup>

- **Increase the participation of women and women-led organisations in Peace and Security:**

- Build on the momentum of Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security to strengthen Ireland's commitment to UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Recognising the adverse effects of conflict on women and girls, ensure a particular focus on their critical role in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacebuilding and governance.



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Councillor Aminata Bangura sits in front of her office with a colleague. In March 2018, Aminata was elected a local Councillor in her Ward in Kambia District, Sierra Leone. Although there are 23 local Councillors, only three are women. Councillor Aminata encourages other women to stand for election, and is part of a group of women Councillors who come together to form a core team of mentors for other women. Photo: Trócaire/Caroline Long.